



# Department of Justice

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## **Funding for School Resource Officers and Troy Peer Court will help curb juvenile crime**

### ***Funds Will Hire School Resource Officers and assist with the start-up of the Troy Peer Court***

Friday, November 1, 2013 – U.S. Attorney Richard S. Hartunian today announced two federal funding awards for Troy. The City of Troy has been awarded \$375,000, through the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), which will be used to hire three School Resource Officers (SROs). U. S. Attorney Hartunian also announced a Project Safe Neighborhoods award of \$7,763 to be used to start the Troy Peer Court.

The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), in the office of the U.S. Department of Justice, advances the practice of community policing in America's law enforcement agencies. One method of accomplishing this is through their grants programs and funding. Today's funding is for School Resource Officers (SROs). SROs are sworn law enforcement officers responsible for providing security and crime prevention strategies in the school environment. The responsibilities of SROs are similar to regular service police officers in that they have the ability to make arrests, respond to calls for service, and document incidents that occur within their jurisdiction.

Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) is a nationwide grant program administered by the U.S. Department of Justice to reduce gun and gang crime by networking existing local programs that target such crime. There are five elements to PSN: partnerships, strategic planning, training, community outreach and accountability. PSN funding has been used, among other things, to implement juvenile crime deterrence strategies, such as a peer court. By intervening early in a juvenile's deviant behaviors, the chances of changing those behaviors to positive, more productive ones is much more likely. Such early intervention can help reduce the number of youth engaging in gang activities and crime.

"In the wake of past tragedies, it's clear that we need to be willing to take all possible steps to ensure that our kids are safe when they go to school and our communities are safe at all times," said Attorney General Eric Holder. "These critical investments represent the Justice Department's latest effort to strengthen key law enforcement capabilities, and to provide communities with the resources they need to protect our young people. Especially in a time of increased challenges and limited budgets, our top priority must always be the safety and well-being of our children, their families and our communities."

“Keeping our children safe in school, along with securing the safety of our communities is of critical importance and I am pleased to join the Attorney General and the COPS Office in announcing these grants which will help provide our communities with the resources needed to accomplish this vital mission,” said United States Attorney Richard S. Hartunian.

“When I was running for mayor,” said Troy’s Mayor Lou Rosamilia, “I emphasized the importance of School Resource Officers (SROs) in our schools. It’s all about safety – of our students, faculty and staff. SROs develop relationships with our students, and in fact become role models for them. If a disturbance occurs in a building, the SROs are able to get the situation under control very quickly. And because the SROs are based in the schools, we don’t have to take any patrols off our streets. We are honored to be included in this beneficial grant award.”

“In the City of Troy, our schools have thousands of students, teachers and support staff spread out over two school districts for almost seven hours each school day. These schools really are micro neighborhoods, if you will, for 5 days per week from Sept through June. This grant provides us with the added opportunity to continue to exercise our community oriented policing and problem solving (COPPS) paradigm,” said Troy Police Commissioner Anthony D. Magnetto. “It is through the COPPS philosophy that we are able to not only enhance our police response to problems but also to provide crime prevention services, and early intervention as well, by interacting with our kids on a personal level each and every school day. In these tough economic times, this grant allows us some fiscal relief for a program that the City of Troy has fully funded, and has been faithfully committed to, for over a decade.”

City Council President Lynn Kopka said, “I’ve always been a staunch advocate for School Resource Officers (SROs) and now with this grant, we can continue utilizing SROs in our schools and free up other officers to effectively patrol our streets. This is fantastic news for Troy.”

“With much less money, but the same level of importance and impact, I announce a small Project Safe Neighborhoods grant to help the start-up of a Troy Peer Court,” added United States Attorney Hartunian. “Youth courts, or peer courts, are proven as a successful tool that intervenes on juvenile delinquency and crime. Success rates of near 90% of youth successfully completing their youth court sentence not committing another crime for another year or more have been documented in the majority of youth courts across the nation. Almost eight thousand dollars has been awarded to the Troy Police Department to start up the Troy Peer Court.”

“Members of the Troy community including residents, business owners, agency and school representatives, the Troy Police Department, Rensselaer County Probation and County Attorney’s Office and others have been meeting since March of this year because we are concerned about the level of juvenile crime in Troy and believe a peer court can be a successful early intervention. This funding will allow us now to recruit youth, train them and start hearing appropriate cases in the Troy Peer Court,” said Rensselaer County Family Court Judge Elizabeth Walsh. “We are very grateful to the U. S. Attorney’s Office for their support through all this planning and the opportunity to get started.”

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**COPS**  
COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING SERVICES

*BUILDING Relationships, SOLVING Problems*

The COPS Hiring Program offers grants to state, local and tribal law enforcement agencies to hire or rehire community policing officers. The program provides the salary and benefits for officer and deputy hires for three years.

Grantees for the 2013 hiring program were selected based on their fiscal needs, local crime rates, and their community policing plans. There was an additional focus this year on agencies requesting assistance in developing school safety programs that would include the hiring of a school resource officer. School resource officer positions funded by the COPS Office are sworn law enforcement positions that work within a school district or facility, interacting directly with school administrators and students.

Overall the COPS Office funded awards to 263 cities and counties, aimed at creating 937 law enforcement positions. More than \$125 million will be awarded nationally, including nearly \$45 million to fund 356 new school resource officer positions.

The COPS Office is a federal agency responsible for advancing community policing nationwide. Since 1995, COPS has awarded over \$14 billion to advance community policing, including grants awarded to more than 13,000 state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies to fund the hiring and redeployment of approximately 125,000 officers and provide a variety of knowledge resource products including publications, training, and technical assistance.

For the entire list of grantees and additional information about the 2013 COPS Hiring Program, visit the COPS website at [www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov).



Project Safe Neighborhoods ("PSN") is a Department of Justice initiative to reduce gun crimes. It networks existing local law enforcement programs that target gun crimes and provides a focal point for community activists in their anti-violence and anti-crime initiatives.

There are five elements to PSN: partnerships, strategic planning, training, community outreach and accountability.

In 2006, in response to the growing problem of violent gangs across the country, the Department expanded Project Safe Neighborhoods to include a focus on gangs and gang violence. The goal is to use strategies and partnerships with state and local law enforcement and communities pioneered under PSN to shut down violent gangs in America. As a result, although PSN remains "America's Network Against Gun Violence," each federal judicial district has incorporated anti-gang efforts into its PSN program.

More information can be found at [PSN.gov](http://PSN.gov).

# An Overview of Youth Courts

## Structure & Background

Youth Courts are an alternative to the traditional juvenile court system<sup>1</sup>

- Targets youth aged 11-17 years old.
- Deals with first time offenders charged with either a misdemeanor or status offense
- Addresses early stages of delinquency
- Based on elements of restorative justice, concentrating on the harm done to the person or community
- Seeks to reintegrate the youth into the community and not stigmatize them

Ensures offenders take responsibility for their actions, are held accountable, and make restitution for violating the law<sup>2</sup>

- Is completely voluntary; in most Youth Courts the offender must admit guilt
- Youth Court members are recruited from the community or school and trained to fill the roles of prosecutors, defense attorneys, juries, bailiffs and judges
- Typical offenses include theft, vandalism, assault, truancy, possession of marijuana, underage drinking etc.
- Sentences include community service, apologies to victims, workshops, essays on the effects of crime on society

Youth Courts offer an approach to engage the community in a partnership with the juvenile justice system<sup>3</sup>

- Imposes sentence, does not determine guilt
- Enforces positive peer pressure to help address the issues of delinquent behaviors in youths<sup>4</sup>
- Identifies problems and develops solutions for community and school issues
- Facilitates the development of sound problem-solving, decision-making and critical-thinking skills

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<sup>1</sup> OJJDP, Stickley, Connell, Wilson, and Gottfredson, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> HFI Report Series- Youth Courts: An Empirical Update and Analysis of Future Organizational and Research Needs, 2008

<sup>3</sup> NCJRS-Youth/Teen Court Diversion Programs, March 2013

<sup>4</sup> NCJRS-Youth/Teen Court Diversion Programs, March 2013



## Data

- Youth Courts have been rapidly expanding in the past decade from 78 programs in 1994 to over 1,400 currently <sup>5</sup>
- 60 percent of Youth Courts are funded with less than \$50,000 per year <sup>6</sup>
- A cost benefit analysis of Onondaga County Youth Court showed a savings of approximately \$1000 per youth diverted to Youth Court <sup>7</sup>
- 89 percent of respondents successfully complete the program <sup>8</sup>
- 39 percent of teen courts only accept first time offenders<sup>9</sup>

## Outcomes

- 87-92 percent non-recidivism rate for successful completers of Youth Court <sup>10</sup>
- Enhanced perceptions of procedural justice
- Improved attitudes towards authority
- Better understanding of legal system
- Improved grades
- 1 in 5 juveniles return after completing the program to serve as volunteers
- The Taunton Youth Court showed the following accomplishments for 2008<sup>11</sup>:
  - ❖ Students provided 1,775 hours of volunteer services, valued at more than \$18,000
  - ❖ School suspension rates were reduced by 44 percent
  - ❖ School attendance increased by 65 percent among participants

## For more information:

More information about Youth Courts can be found at <http://www.youthcourt.net>.

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<sup>5</sup> NCJRS-Youth/Teen Court Diversion Programs, March 2013

<sup>6</sup> HFI Report Series- Youth Courts: An Empirical Update and Analysis of Future Organizational and Research Needs, 2008

<sup>7</sup> Onondaga County Youth Court Cost Benefit Analysis-1990

<sup>8</sup> HFI Report Series- Youth Courts: An Empirical Update and Analysis of Future Organizational and Research Needs, 2008

<sup>9</sup> OJJDP- Teen Courts A Focus on Research, Butts and Buck, October 2000

<sup>10</sup> Onondaga County Youth Court Study- SU Maxwell Graduate School-1990

<sup>11</sup> Title V Incentive Grants for Local Delinquency Prevention Programs;2008 Report to Congress